

Graeme Charles on Co-operation in The Devondaler



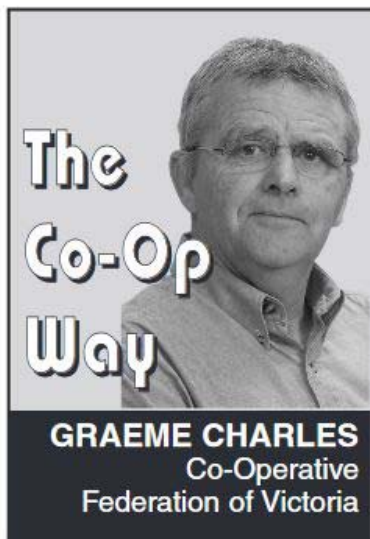
Graeme Charles was the Executive Officer and Secretary of the Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd between 1999 and 2002 and Deputy Chairman between 2002 and 2008 – the peak body for co-operatives in the Australian State of Victoria.

Between 2006 and 2008 Graeme Charles was a guest columnist for The Devondaler – the monthly newspaper of Murray Goulburn Co-operative Co. Limited. The Devondaler was established in 1986.

The Co-operative is one of Australia's largest with 2200 dairy farmer members and more than 2000 employees.

Twenty of these columns have been reproduced.

Dairy Co-operatives in India



I recently met an Indian gentleman whilst travelling in Turkey, and, as is often the case with me much to my good wife's despair, I managed to get him talking about co-operatives in his country. Whilst he wasn't a member of any co-operative himself, he was certainly the full bottle when it came to talking about India's dairy co-operatives.

What he told me about them reminded me so much of the origins of our dairy co-operatives. The contribution of co-operatives to India's dairy industry is enormous. India, by the way, is the leading producer of milk in the world and co-operatives are the backbone of its dairy industry. The value of milk output makes it the single largest agricultural commodity in India.

Back in 1946 tired of exploitation by traders and local private dairies, the milk producers began organizing themselves into village dairy co-operatives. These co-operatives federated into the Kaira Milk Producers Union, which soon had its first dairy plant. It started producing and marketing milk products under the brand name Amul. The Amul model of co-operative soon became an example for others to emulate. The Government controlled dairy co-operatives had failed, so it was very keen to see the Amul model replicated in other parts of the country. Amul today is the most popular brand of milk in India.

While the village-based dairy co-operatives have helped lift individual farmers, most of them marginal, small, and landless, out of poverty, the benefits of belonging to their co-

operative have been obvious. However, as the small co-operatives merge and amalgamate in order to compete with their privately owned rivals, the challenge now is to continue demonstrating clear benefits to their members.

One other thing that is worth noting from this story is the fact that support for the establishment and development of agricultural co-operatives has always been a matter of government policy in India. What a pity we can't say the same thing in Australia. Here co-operatives are completely absent when it comes to looking at government policy. This situation can be laid squarely at the feet of the Australian co-operative movement's failure to organize itself into an effective movement capable of lobbying and influencing governments of either persuasion.

12 November 2007



List of Graeme Charles articles published between 2006 - 2008

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